United Nations E/ICEF/2000/P/L.31

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: Limited
10 July 2000

Original: English

For action

United Nations Children's Fund
Executive Board
Second regular session 2000
18-20 September 2000
Item 3 of the provisional agenda*

Recommendation for funding for a short-duration country programme**

Mauritius

Summary

The present document contains a recommendation for funding from regular resources and other resources for the country programme of Mauritius with duration of three years to support activities in the context of a transitional programme leading to the end of a full-fledged programme of cooperation. The Executive Director *recommends* that the Executive Board approve the amount of $1,500,000 from regular resources, subject to the availability of funds, and $150,000 in other resources, subject to the availability of specific-purpose contributions, for the period 2001 to 2003.

* E/ICEF/2000/14.

** The figures provided in the present document are final and take into account unspent balances of programme cooperation at the end of 1999. They will be contained in the summary of recommendations for regular resources and other resources programmes (E/ICEF/2000/P/L.27).

00-54226 (E) 180800

Basic data

(1998 unless otherwise stated)

Child population (millions, under 18 years)	0.4
U5MR (per 1,000 live births)	23
IMR (per 1,000 live births)	19
Underweight (% moderate and severe) (1995)	16
Maternal mortality rate (per 100,000 live births) (1997)	50
Literacy (% male/female) (1995)	86/78
Primary school enrolment (% net, male/female) (1996)	98/98
Primary school children reaching grade 5 (%) (1995)	99
Access to safe water (%) (1990)	98
Routine EPI vaccines financed by Government (%) (1997)	100
GNP per capita (US$)	3 730
One-year-olds fully immunized against:	
Tuberculosis	87 per cent
Diphtheria/pertussis/tetanus	90 per cent
Measles	85 per cent
Poliomyelitis	90 per cent
Pregnant women immunized against tetanus	78 per cent

The situation of children and women

1. Recognizing systematic improvement of the situation of its children and women, the Government of Mauritius and UNICEF agreed formally in May 1999 to implement a three-year transitional programme for 2001-2003, leading to the end of a full-fledged UNICEF programme of cooperation. Over the past 25 years, Mauritius has undergone a major transformation at the level of the country's economic and social structures. The rapid economic development has led to improved living standards and better access to social services for a large number of the population.

2. The country recognizes the importance of investing in children and the need to respect the rights of all children as an overarching national priority. The 1992 National Programme of Action (NPA) was updated recently to provide a comprehensive national strategy for children. The National Children's Council (NCC) that was set up in 1991 is mandated to promote the welfare of children, facilitate the implementation of programmes, and monitor and evaluate their impact. A review carried out in 1999 on the performance of NCC has shown that it is not fulfilling all of its objectives and that it needs to enhance its organizational, human and financial resources to be more effective. In 1994, the Child Protection Act was enacted to make better provisions for the protection of children against ill-treatment, neglect, abandonment, destitution and any other form of exposure to harm. However, certain persisting social and cultural practices contravene the provisions of existing legislation and of the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

3. The generally improving trend of social indicators has become somewhat stagnant in recent years, and the main challenge of extending access to services for all population groups remains. Economic growth has been unable to break the poverty cycle for many families, and socio-economic disparities and exclusion have become more flagrant. The infant mortality rate has declined from 57 per 1,000 live births in 1970 to 19 in 1998, but there has been no significant improvement since then. Another concern is the rise in the incidence of low-birth-weight babies — from 9.5 to 12.7 per cent from 1991 to 1998. Although prenatal facilities allow for 95 per cent coverage, a significant number of pregnant women do not attend antenatal clinics in early pregnancy. Despite the provision of iron tablets at the level of all health services, iron deficiency is prevalent among pregnant women.

4. Mauritius is committed to the principle of total equity in educational opportunity. Much progress has been made over the years to increase enrolment at all levels of education. Despite this progress, significant

disparities in performance rates in certain regions and among certain population groups reflect deeply rooted and multifaceted inequalities in the system. Low achievement rates at the end of primary school are found in the most socially and economically deprived regions of the country. School enrolment, which is 95 per cent at the primary level, decreases to just above 50 per cent at the secondary level due to high drop-out and failure rates at the end of primary schooling. Excessive competition within the primary school system, combined with pressure exerted by parents for their children to achieve excellence, often lead to the violation of the child's rights to leisure, play and participation in cultural and artistic activities. There is a problem of inadequacy and underutilization of co-curricular and extra-curricular activities in schools due mainly to the highly competitive system of education.

5. A significant number of disabled children are still excluded from school. Up to now, special needs education has been limited to children with various physical, sensory and mental handicaps, excluding children with intellectual and emotional difficulties. The most important barrier to inclusive education is the general negative perception towards disabled children, which reflects unfriendly attitudes and habits in schools and in the education system as a whole.

6. There are no systematic and comprehensive data on child abuse and neglect, child labour or sexual exploitation. The last decade has witnessed a number of positive actions for the protection of the rights of children living under such circumstances. Sensitization programmes have created more public awareness of the problem of child abuse, resulting in fewer cases going unreported. The legislative framework has been strengthened and services for child protection decentralized to facilitate the detection and reporting of cases. A serious problem is the scarcity of trained personnel in the areas of counselling, rehabilitation, child psychology and other related fields. This is aggravated by the lack of structural long-term coordination with all related agencies, both public and private.

7. In a context of rapid societal changes, adolescence is becoming increasingly a period of opportunity and risk. Every year some 3,000 children leave the education system without the skills necessary for them to reach their full potential. Adolescents are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases as they are generally left alone to deal with biological and social transformations without knowledge and skills on sexual and reproductive matters. The social norms and taboos with regard to sex education are major obstacles to successful prevention and care efforts. As of April 1999, a cumulative total of 207 cases of AIDS were reported for the whole population. Compared to many countries in Africa, the low prevalence of HIV in Mauritius can easily lead to complacency and underestimation of the risks of the epidemic, which may be at a very early stage in the country.

Programme cooperation, 1996-2000

8. Although the country programme is limited in terms of human and financial resources, there have been many achievements. The Convention on the Rights of the Child was widely disseminated by government agencies such as the NCC and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) through main communication channels. Twenty-three parts of national laws have been harmonized with the principles of the Convention. Although more people have heard about the Convention than ever before, it is not clear how this knowledge of children's rights is influencing social practice, policy decisions and programme planning. The ground has been laid for a more dynamic and effective NCC with an in-depth review of the Council's functioning. The Cabinet has approved the recommendations of the review and a revision of the NCC Act is in progress. The administration of juvenile justice has been studied and the recommendations are being used as a basis for planning training programmes and reforms. Social welfare officers and police officers have been trained on the use of a multi-agency approach for dealing with victims of abuse. Education for development has been integrated successfully within the formal and non-formal education system and has contributed to fostering concepts and attitudes of solidarity, peace, tolerance, interdependence, social justice and environmental awareness among children.

9. The programme has contributed to bringing early childhood development (ECD) high on the Government agenda. The Government has adopted a national ECD policy that was prepared in consultation with the various stakeholders. Child-care workers have received training, and home-based day care facilities have been promoted and piloted in two deprived areas. Curricula for children under five years old have been developed

and pre-tested and will be used in all day-care centres and pre-schools by 2001. A distance mode proficiency course in ECD has been launched for 1,000 practising pre-school teachers. Health interventions supported by the programme have gradually shifted from cure to prevention. Supply activities are less prominent as assistance has been geared towards research, the development of protocols, training and education of parents and families. A programme for the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV was supported. All pregnant women are tested during antenatal care visits, receiving counselling and other services.

10. A basic education and life skills programme for 500 out-of-school adolescents has been successfully developed and implemented on the island of Rodrigues for five years. The same programme, with necessary adjustments, has been implemented in Mauritius since 1998. Three NGOs have set up a nation-wide network to provide out-of-school adolescents with age- and gender-appropriate information and counselling in moments of crisis.

11. On the island of Rodrigues, community capacity-development initiatives have improved the situation of children considerably. The situation is different on the island of Mauritius, where attempts to empower families and communities for fulfilling their obligations to meet children's survival and development rights have been hindered by the absence of community-based organizations and the low management capacity of the few that exist.

Lessons learned from past cooperation

12. Most of the major achievements and developments described had their origins in demonstration projects, policy advocacy or capacity-building activities initially supported by the UNICEF programme of cooperation and later brought to scale by integration within government policy, and with the involvement of all partners. Social mobilization through professional communication techniques has brought expected changes in knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. The innovative communication strategies used in the present country programme will be extended to the next country programme.

13. Studies and pilot interventions have indicated that the forging of a partnership between the private and public sectors is feasible. UNICEF should play a catalytic role in bringing together partners from different backgrounds, interests and culture, and develop a good organizational structure in which each of them has the motivation and support to fulfil their obligations towards children.

14. The shift from the needs-based approach to the child rights-based approach initiated after the 1998 mid-term review has allowed more focus on the protection and participation rights of children and the identification of a number of actions to address violated rights. The support provided to ministries for the formulation of the Early Childhood Policy and the NPA Implementation Plan have given positive results. Thus, public policy formulation should continue to be important in the next country programme as it provides good opportunities to shape major social changes in the country for the benefit of children.

15. Adolescents have not been given the necessary attention for their development. They lack adequate access to learning facilities, youth-friendly information and counselling services, decision-making bodies and proper protection when in conflict with law. UNICEF should continue to advocate for greater dialogue with political leaders, administrators, service providers, media, communities and families to ensure that adolescents receive proper services for their full development.

16. More sociological research for a better identification and deeper understanding of problems affecting children is needed. More evaluations and studies to measure the impact of policy on programme interventions should be conducted and the relevant reports properly disseminated.

Country programme preparation process

17. A task force comprised of representatives of the Government, UNICEF, the private sector, the business community and civil society was set up to assess the situation of children and analyse the different levels of causes of problems and unfulfilled rights. The task force also undertook an in-depth examination of what is currently being done for children and agreed on proposals to address the identified priority problems in order to improve the realization of the corresponding children's rights. In addition, the task force studied the implications of the reduction of UNICEF financial

Recommended programme cooperation, 2001-2003

Estimated annual expenditure

(In thousands of United States dollars)

	2001	*2002*	*2003*	*Total*
Regular resources				
Institutional capacity-building	200	150	100	450
Early childhood development	150	125	75	350
Adolescent development	150	125	50	325
Cross-sectoral costs	100	100	175	375
Subtotal	**600**	**500**	**400**	**1 500**
Other resources				
Early childhood development	25	25	25	75
Adolescent development	25	25	25	75
Subtotal	**50**	**50**	**50**	**150**
Total	**650**	**550**	**450**	**1 650**

support to Mauritius during the three coming years and advised on the future course of actions for ensuring adequate funds for the realization of children's rights. This has led to the preparation of a position paper that has been approved by the Government and that forms the basis for the formulation of the present country programme recommendation. During the same period, the office was involved in the preparation of the Common Country Assessment (CCA) and the formulation of the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (UNDAF) under the leadership of the United Nations resident coordinator. The United Nations country team reviewed the first draft of the CCA in January 2000. A workshop was held in April 2000 to validate the revised CCA, identify key strategic areas for the UNDAF and define a mission statement for the United Nations system in Mauritius.

Country programme goal and objective

18. The overall goal of the proposed country programme is to ensure that all children, especially those with multiple vulnerabilities, grow to their full potential by helping duty-bearers to fulfil their obligations for the realization of children's rights. More specifically, the transitional programme will aim to provide Mauritius with an independent Council for Children, which will assume some significant elements of the UNICEF mandate.

Relation to national and international partners

19. The country programme is in line with the priorities of the country for (a) the realization of children's rights, in particular the right of the child to protection; (b) setting up a national mechanism with adequate organizational, financial and human capacity to provide leadership on child rights; (c) implementation of the national ECD policy; and (d) the empowerment of adolescents so that they can develop to their full potential and participate fully in social and economic activities. The programme also takes into consideration the four key issues identified in the 2000 CCA: (a) social development, drug abuse and trafficking; (b) reproductive health and HIV/AIDS; (c) environment; and (d) human rights, gender and child care. The programme does not reflect regional priorities since malaria and HIV/AIDS are not major issues. With a major focus on ECD, child protection

and improvement of young people's health and development, the country programme is in line with UNICEF overall programme priorities under the medium-term plan.

Programme strategy

20. The country programme objective will be reached by (a) focusing on children in two critical period — early childhood and adolescence; (b) developing capacity at household, community and national institution levels to enable duty-bearers to respect and fulfil their obligations towards children; (c) implementing innovative activities to demonstrate how the principle of the "best interest of the child" can be applied in practical ways and further extended to scale; and (d) promoting the rights-based approach and the Convention on the Rights of the Child in the reform of national legislation, policies and administrative practices through advocacy and policy dialogue. The country programme of cooperation for 2001-2003 comprises three programmes: (a) institutional capacity-building; (b) ECD; and (c) adolescent development.

21. The *institutional capacity-building* programme aims at strengthening NCC by increasing its organizational, financial and human capacity for the realization of children's rights. The strengthening of NCC is both an aim of the country programme and a means to achieve the smooth phasing out of UNICEF from Mauritius. Transition will take place gradually, including adjustments of current administrative and legal structures, and building of technical and political capacity in the first stage. Overall planning of NCC activities and transferring responsibilities for managing UNICEF-supported programmes will take place in the second stage. Identifying resources and consolidating activities will take place in the third stage of the process. By the end of the three years, NCC will be fully in charge of all currently UNICEF-supported programmes and projects, in addition to other responsibilities which may be appropriately added in the process. UNICEF will gradually reduce its responsibilities proportionally to the gradual development of NCC.

22. The *ECD* programme aims at ensuring equal opportunities for children aged 0-8 years. It focuses on the realization of every child's right to survival, protection, care and optimal development — from conception to early primary school age. The key strategies for promoting equal chances to all for a good start in life are (a) strengthening the caring capacities of families and communities through greater access to information and training that upgrade parenting skills; (b) constructing links between homes and day-care centres, and schools to ensure smooth transitions; and (c) strengthening partnerships among and between the Government, non-government agencies and donors, and cooperative networking among ECD stakeholders. The focus will be on improving the quality of care and stimulation provided to children in their formative years. The problems of neonatal deaths, low-birth-weight babies and the low prevalence of exclusive breastfeeding and maternal malnutrition will be addressed through information, education and communication interventions within the parenting education project.

23. The *adolescent development* programme aims at empowering adolescents for their full participation in society. Efforts will focus on providing them with second chances for the acquisition of basic education and vocational training, skills crucial for participation in a modern and rapidly evolving society. The other strategies selected are: (a) creating greater awareness of adolescents' rights and needs; (b) strengthening networking and partnerships among service providers; and (c) empowering adolescents with social and vocational skills. The programme will provide support to improve the quality and coverage of non-formal education schemes for out-of-school adolescents run by NGOs and the renewal of curriculum for vocational training in state schools. The programme will also provide technical assistance for enhancing the programming process for a meaningful empowerment of adolescents in line with the National Youth Policy.

Monitoring and evaluation

24. Monitoring and evaluation will aim at selecting a set of key indicators and tools to assess results of NCC activities. The ECD programme will be monitored through the number of day-care centres engaged in the accreditation process, the number of trained caregivers and changes in child-rearing practices. In the adolescent development programme, the proportion of adolescents aged 13-16 years reaching a specific level of learning, as well as those having access to career guidance and vocational training, will be measured. Each implementing agency will prepare project

progress reports for the quarterly and annual reviews, which will be monitored by the coordinating ministry. A mid-term evaluation will enable the readjustment of the country programme and its reorientation. An end-cycle evaluation will enable assessment of performance in terms of relevance, efficiency and effectiveness, and will inform decision-making on the challenges faced after the withdrawal of UNICEF from Mauritius.

Collaboration with partners

25. A major thrust of the 2001-2003 country programme will be capacity-development. The aim is not only to improve the level and effectiveness of current operations, but also to ensure that various institutions — households, communities, government agencies and NGOs — will maintain this improved performance in the future.

26. UNICEF will continue to collaborate closely with its partners, particularly within the United Nations system. It will contribute to and benefit from the UNDAF process and ensure that United Nations-supported programmes have the best impact on child development. Collaboration with NGOs will be maintained to identify, test and promote innovative actions. They can also act as watchdogs over public policy formulation and implementation for the realization of children's rights. A regular working relationship will be developed with the business community to increase private sector commitment and investment in children's well-being. A partnership will be developed with the University of Mauritius, in particular with the newly established sociological division for research and studies on children.

Programme management

27. The Ministry of Economic Development, Productivity and Regional Development will be responsible for overall coordination of the country programme. The responsibility for project management rests with the heads of government ministries concerned and the designated NGOs, in partnership with UNICEF. For each project, a focal point with overall responsibility for planning, managing and monitoring implementation of programme activities will be identified.

28. The Government and UNICEF will jointly prepare annual plans of action and monitor implementation on a quarterly basis. An annual review will be carried out at the end of each year, and its results will directly influence the planning and preparation of project plans of action for the following year.